

Trichloroethylene Patient Information Sheet

This handout provides information and follow-up instructions for persons who have been exposed to trichloroethylene.

What is trichloroethylene?

Trichloroethylene is a colorless liquid with a sweet, chloroform-like smell. It is volatile and flammable, but does not burn easily. Trichloroethylene is used to degrease metal parts and to dry clean fabric. It is also used as a solvent in printing inks, paints, lacquers, varnishes, and adhesives.

What immediate health effects can be caused by exposure to trichloroethylene?

At high levels of exposure, trichloroethylene can cause dizziness, blurred vision, a feeling of excitement, nausea, and vomiting. Breathing very high levels can cause irregular heartbeat, fainting, brain damage, and even death. If the skin has been in contact with trichloroethylene for a long time, skin rash or chemical burns may result. Generally, the more serious the exposure, the more severe the symptoms.

Can trichloroethylene poisoning be treated?

There is no antidote for trichloroethylene poisoning. Patients who have swallowed or inhaled large amounts of trichloroethylene need to be hospitalized. Most patients get completely well.

Are any future health effects likely to occur?

A single small exposure from which a person recovers quickly is not likely to cause delayed or long-term effects. After a serious exposure or many exposures, damage to the nerves can occur. Fatigue, memory loss, headache, confusion, and depression have been reported by workers using trichloroethylene for long periods at their jobs. Trichloroethylene is believed to be a human carcinogen.

What tests can be done if a person has been exposed to trichloroethylene?

Specific tests for the presence of trichloroethylene breakdown products in blood and urine generally are not useful to the doctor. If a severe exposure has occurred, blood and urine analyses and other tests may show whether the nerves, heart, lungs, liver, or kidneys have been damaged. Testing is not needed in every case.

Where can more information about trichloroethylene be found?

More information about trichloroethylene can be obtained from your regional poison control center; your state, county, or local health department; the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR); your doctor; or a clinic in your area that specializes in occupational and environmental health. If the exposure happened at work, you may wish to discuss it with your employer, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), or the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Ask the person who gave you this form for help in locating these telephone numbers.

Follow-up Instructions

Keep this page and take it with you to your next appointment. Follow *only* the instructions checked below.

- Call your doctor or the Emergency Department if you develop any unusual signs or symptoms within the next 24 hours, especially:
- coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath
 - dizziness or distorted perceptions
 - nausea or diarrhea
 - increased pain or a discharge from your eyes
 - increased redness or pain or a pus-like discharge in the area of a skin burn
- No follow-up appointment is necessary unless you develop any of the symptoms listed above.
- Call for an appointment with Dr. _____ in the practice of _____.
When you call for your appointment, please say that you were treated in the Emergency Department at _____ Hospital by _____ and were advised to be seen again in _____ days.
- Return to the Emergency Department/ _____ Clinic on (date) _____ at _____ AM/PM for a follow-up examination.
- Do not perform vigorous physical activities for 1 to 2 days.
- You may resume everyday activities including driving and operating machinery.
- Do not return to work for _____ days.
- You may return to work on a limited basis. See instructions below.
- Avoid exposure to cigarette smoke for 72 hours; smoke may worsen the condition of your lungs.
- Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages for at least 24 hours; alcohol may worsen injury to your stomach or have other effects.
- Avoid taking the following medications: _____
- You may continue taking the following medication(s) that your doctor(s) prescribed for you: _____

- Other instructions: _____

- Provide the Emergency Department with the name and the number of your primary care physician so that the ED can send him or her a record of your emergency department visit.
 - You or your physician can get more information on the chemical by contacting: _____
_____ or _____, or by checking out the following Internet Web sites: _____; _____.

Signature of patient _____ Date _____

Signature of physician _____ Date _____